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White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus*, first occurrence in the Malagasy region

J. Nick Dymond

On 4 November 1992 N. D. Hunter and I were birding at Fairview Estate, Mahé, Seychelles. Low cloud cover had brought down many Seychelles Swiftlets *Collocalia elaphra* and while watching these we suddenly realised that there was more than one species of swift present. Among the Swiftlets was a much larger, chunky swift which, as it came nearer, was clearly a needletail *Hirundapus* sp. Subsequent prolonged views from various positions and angles established that there were two individuals present. Although they ranged over a considerable area they were often in view simultaneously, and on several occasions flashed past us at very close range.

Description

A large, very thickset swift with long, broad-based wings with very pointed tips. It had a fairly short, square-ended tail, sometimes closed to give a tapered rear-end effect. It flew by gliding most of the time with wings slightly bowed in anhedral position, occasionally generating speed with short bursts of rapid wingbeats.

Upper parts: crown, nape, hind-neck and upper mantle blackish-brown, fading into pale greyish-brown on mantle and back forming a saddle, darkening to dark brown/blackish on rump and tail.

Wings: blackish, flight feathers slightly paler than coverts. Dark greenish gloss occasionally apparent on wings and, much harder to see, on crown (dependent on angle of flight and light).

Under parts: chin and throat whitish, sometimes hard to see. White under tail-coverts tapering forwards onto lower flanks formed a very prominent white 'horse-shoe' under rear end. Breast, belly and remainder of flanks dark brown.

The White-throated Needletail breeds in the Eastern Palearctic, from central and southern Siberia to Japan, China and Taiwan, the northern Himalayas and Assam. The northern, nominate race is wholly migratory and winters in Australia. It is an irregular visitor to New Zealand and stragglers have also reached Fiji and Macquarie Island. It has been recorded as a vagrant in the Western Palearctic with 15 records up to 1991 from Britain and Ireland (May-July), Finland (April-May), Malta (November) and Norway (May).

The Seychelles Bird Records Committee has accepted this record which constitutes the first occurrence of this species in the Seychelles, as well as for the whole Afrotropical and Malagasy Region. ⑦

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White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus*
by Colin Towse

